

BELFAST'S MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Do I need a visa to travel to the United States?

If you have a Canadian, Bermudan or Mexican passport, refer to <http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/noreg.html>.

Otherwise use the [Visa Waiver Wizard](#) to determine if you are eligible to travel without a visa.

If so, you will need to apply online for ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization). ESTA is Department of Homeland Security (DHS) authorization to travel to the U.S. without a visa. Apply for ESTA at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> for \$14.

If you are not eligible to travel visa-free, you will need to apply for a visa by following the instructions at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

Please obtain ESTA authorization to travel without a visa OR a visa as appropriate before making non-refundable travel arrangements.

2. I am unsure how to answer a question on the ESTA application?

ESTA is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) system so we cannot assist you with completing the application. You can use the [Help](#) function or the [FAQs](#) on the ESTA site. The site also provides the opportunity to [email a question directly to the DHS](#).

3. My ESTA application was denied. Can you tell me why and what should I do now?

ESTA is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) system so we cannot tell you why your application was denied. If you wish to contact the DHS about your ESTA denial, you can do so at <https://help.cbp.gov/app/ask/kw/esta>.

ESTA is authorization to travel to the U.S. without a visa. If your ESTA application was denied, you will need a visa for travel to the U.S. We represent the Department of State (DOS) and we are responsible for issuing visas in the UK. You will find information about the visa application process on our website at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

4. I am not eligible to travel without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program. How do I apply for a visa?

You will find a step-by-step guide to the visa application process on our website at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

5. I have an arrest/caution/conviction. Do I need a visa and if so, how do I apply?

Please read the advice at [Arrest/Caution/Conviction](#). If having read the advice, you are still not sure whether you need a visa or not, the only way to resolve this question is to apply for a visa. You will find a step-by-step guide to the visa application process on our website at [How to Apply for a Visa](#). Note the UK Rehabilitation of Offenders Act does not apply to U.S. visa law so convictions considered "spent" in the UK must be declared.

6. I have a visa. Do I also need to apply for ESTA?

ESTA is authorization to travel without a visa. If you have a visa, you should NOT apply for ESTA.

7. I am having a problem completing the online visa application form DS-160. Can you help?

We cannot help you to complete the online visa application form. Please refer to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for assistance.

8. I cannot find Belfast on the list of processing locations on the online visa application form DS-160. What should I do?

You will find it listed as "Northern Ireland, Belfast".

9. I selected "England, London" as the processing location on my DS-160 visa application form but I want to apply/I have already booked an appointment in Belfast. Is this a problem?

You should complete a new DS-160 selecting "Northern Ireland, Belfast" as the processing location at least 24 hours before your Belfast interview.

If you have already created an account and/or booked a Belfast appointment with a London DS160, you do not need to change the DS160 number on your account at <https://ais.usvisa-info.com/en-gb/niv> as it does not affect your application in any way.

10. I have completed the DS-160 visa application form. How to I book an appointment for interview?

Refer to Step 4 in the step-by-step guide to the visa application process at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

11. Will I have to leave my passport at the Consulate after the visa interview? And if so, how can I fly home?

If your application is successful, you will need to leave your passport with us for visa processing. You should check with the airline to see if alternate ID is acceptable for the return flight. Easyjet, Flybe, Aer Lingus and Manx2 have agreed to accept a letter from us for check-in if no other form of acceptable ID is available. If you require a letter, ask for it at your visa interview.

12. Can I bring a mobile phone / key fob / small bag with me to my visa interview?

If you must bring a mobile phone or key fob or a small bag with you to the interview, our security guards can store these items for you while you have your visa interview. Some items are [prohibited](#).

13. How long does visa processing take and how will my passport be returned to me after visa processing?

For information on visa processing times, refer to <http://belfast.usconsulate.gov/visa-waittimes.html>. Refer to Step 6 in the [How to Apply for a Visa](#) guide for information about return of passports. Please note that the arrangements you select for the return of your passport cannot be changed after your visa interview.

14. Does my passport need to be valid for at least six months for travel to the U.S.?

The requirement that a passport is valid for travel for six months beyond the holder's stay in the United States is waived for British and Irish passport holders. If you have a British or Irish passport, your passport needs to be valid for the duration of your trip. The requirement is also waived for [certain other nationalities](#).

15. I have a valid visa in an expired passport. Can I continue to use this visa to travel to the United States?

If the passport containing your visa has expired, you may continue to use the valid visa provided you are traveling for the same purpose as when the visa was issued and you also carry a valid passport of the same nationality. If, however, the passport authority clipped the corners of the passport when canceling it and, in so doing, damaged the visa in any way, that visa is no longer valid and cannot be used for travel to the United States.

A change of name will not affect the validity of the visa. We recommend that when traveling, you carry a copy of the document showing the name change.

16. My visa is valid on the date of travel to the U.S. but expires before I depart the U.S. Will this be a problem?

The date of expiry of the visa is the last date on which you can use it to enter the U.S. It does not represent the date by which you must leave the U.S. How long you can remain in the U.S. is at the discretion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port-of-entry. Generally a B1/2 (business/tourist) visa holder will be admitted for up to 6 months.

17. I have a J1 exchange visitor visa or an F1 student visa. How long before my program begins can I enter the U.S. and how long can I remain after the program ends?

Admission to the U.S. is at the discretion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port-of-entry. A J1 or F1 visa holder will usually be admitted to the U.S. up to 30 days before their exchange visitor or academic program begins. J-1 visa holders are usually admitted for the duration of their exchange visitor program plus 30 days, and F1 students for the duration of their academic program plus 60 days.

18. I did not hand in the Arrival/Departure Card I-94/W when I last left the U.S. What should I do?

If you are still in possession of the I-94 or I-94W, it is in your best interest to forward it to the appropriate authorities to avoid problems on future travel. For more information, [click here](#).

19. My visa application was denied pending Additional Administrative Processing. How long will this take and how can I find out the current status of my case?

We cannot predict in advance how long the additional administrative processing of your case will take. If you left your passport at the Consulate, we will process your visa application to conclusion as soon as the administrative processing of your case is completed. If you did not, we will contact you when the administrative processing of your case has been completed to request the return of your passport for visa processing. In the meantime, you will find case status information on our [Online Tracker](#).

20. My visa application was denied pending approval of a "waiver of ineligibility" from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). How long will this take and how can I find out the current status of my case?

You should allow at least 6 months for DHS waiver processing and it may take longer. We have no control over DHS processing times. Waivers for tourist travel cannot be expedited under any circumstances. You will find case status information on our [Online Tracker](#).

21. I left my passport at the Consulate pending the completion of Additional Administrative Processing of my visa case OR pending the processing of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) waiver of ineligibility. I need my passport for urgent travel. Can I retrieve my passport without affecting the ongoing processing of my visa application?

Yes. Send a prepaid self-addressed Royal Mail Special Delivery envelope together with a cover note requesting the return of your passport to Visa Section, U.S. Consulate General, Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Road, Belfast, BT9 5GR. When we are ready to issue your visa, we will contact you to request the resubmission of your passport for visa processing.

22. I want to contact the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) directly about the length of time it is taking to process my “waiver of ineligibility” and to find out what I can do to have my case expedited?

The DHS receive many thousands of waiver applications each year. They process waiver applications strictly in the order in which they receive them. They will not expedite waiver processing for tourist travel under any circumstances. If you wish to contact the DHS, refer to their website www.dhs.gov for contact details.

23. I would like to work in the U.S. What visa do I require and how do I apply?

There is no visa that will allow you to travel around the U.S. picking up casual work as you go. Work visas for the U.S. are issued to allow the bearer to work for a specific employer for a specific limited period.

Exchange Visitor J-1 visas are issued to participants in authorized exchange visitor programs. Such programs include Au Pair programs, Camp Counsellor programs, Intern/Trainee programs, Summer Work/Travel programs for third level students, and programs for visiting physicians and scholars. For further information about these programs and a list of authorized program sponsors, refer to <http://j1visa.state.gov/programs>. The sponsor issues a Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Visa form DS-2019. Once in possession of a form DS-2019, the program participant can apply for a J1 visa by following the instructions at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

Temporary Worker H1 visas are issued to highly skilled individuals with a bachelor’s degree or higher (or equivalent) who will perform services in a prearranged professional job for a U.S. employer. Skilled or unskilled workers traveling to the U.S. to perform a job which is temporary or seasonal in nature and for which there is a shortage of U.S. workers are issued H2 visas. The first step is to locate a prospective U.S. employer – we cannot assist you with this. The prospective employer must file a petition with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) in the U.S. The prospective employer can download a copy of the petition form I-129 together with filing and fee information from the USCIS website www.uscis.gov. If the USCIS approve the petition, they will issue a Notice of Approval. Once in possession of a Notice of Approval, the temporary worker can apply for an H-visa by following the instructions at [How to Apply for a Visa](#).

For further information about the above and other visa categories and their qualifying criteria, [click here](#).

24. I would like to immigrate to the U.S. How do I apply?

You need to qualify for an immigrant visa. U.S. immigration law provides for the issuance of immigrant visas in four general categories: immediate relative, family based, employment based, and the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, known as the "green card" lottery. For more information, refer to [Immigrant Visas](#).